[P.375, A]

RITUAL ACTIVITIES

771 Few, if any, Washo activities do not contain an element which we can describe as religious, supernatural, or magical. This element is most commonly revealed by specifically ritualized behavior carried on while a regular course of action is being taken by a Washo. The following sections will deal with this ritualized behavior and the rationale for it offered by the Washo.

CONCEPTION AND CONTRACEPTION

842 Apparently the Washo have no specific ritual to encourage conception. They are extremely fond of children and desire as many as possible. No Washo has [847] ever heard of, or will admit having heard of, infanti- [848] cide among the Washo, although they have heard of the practice among other Indians. The birth of an illegitimate child, despite the attitude of whites, is greeted with as much joy as that of a legitimate child.

842 However, it is believed that conception can be pre- 789 vented by manipulation of the afterbirth. When the afterbirth is expelled it is wrapped in a piece of deer hide or cloth and buried. It is always placed right side up if a woman desires to continue bearing children. If she wishes not to have children it is buried upside down. If at a later time she wishes to become pregnant, she will turn the earth where the upside-down [178] afterbirth was buried. Informants say that not many people do this any more, mainly because younger women go to the hospital to have their babies, but that many people know how and some may still do it.

842 Certain Indians are reported to be able to prevent 754 the birth of children without the knowledge of the woman concerned. This requires the cooperation of a woman who has just had a child and who will give the magician the afterbirth. It is then buried or hidden upside down and the woman concerned will not become pregnant. The method of transferring the influence of the afterbirth from the real mother to the victim was not explained, and in fact the practice was revealed with a good deal of reluctance.

BIRTH
(2178-2293)

844 Informants report that the baby was not touched, either by the mother or her attendants, until the afterbirth was expelled. The birth and recuperation were [845] carried out in a pit filled with warm ashes. A slow [843] birth was blamed on the belief that the mother had slept too much or been lazy during her pregnancy.

The mother was not allowed to eat salt until the [263] baby's umbilicus dropped off, usually in two or three [856] days. The umbilicus was dried and hung on the right side of the cradleboard to insure that the baby would be right-handed.

846 The baby's hair was cut about thirty days after its [262] birth. Until that time the mother was not permitted to [302] eat meat or to leave her bed of ashes. However, one [178] of my informants who had borne eight children claimed never to have spent more than two weeks in her lying-in bed. She did insist that "in the old days" women adhered to the traditional thirty-day period.

[P. 375, B]

RITUAL ACTIVITIES

843 [845]

A pregnant woman was not permitted to eat eggs with double yolks, or double fruit, lest she have twins. No special action was taken if twins were born, however.

846 827 826

During her confinement a woman was not supposed to rub the sweat from her face. She might dab the sweat off, but to rub it would cause her to be wrinkled in her old age. One informant assured me that this was the truth and pointed to her own relatively unwrinkled face as proof.

852

When a child loses a milk tooth, it is taken up and thrown into the brush. At that time an admonition is shouted to "some little animal with sharp teeth," that it should exchange the milk tooth for a good permanent one (2295a-2301)

PUBERTY: GIRLS
(2305-2352)

881 [178]

Aside from the "big times" which will be described later, the girls' puberty dance was the most important ceremonial gathering among the Washo. This custom has survived with tenacity and it is still considered a matter of real concern if for some reason a girl does not have "her dance."

Although much of the activity at a girls' dance is clearly social throughout the occasion, there is a series of ritual actions which must be carried out. The following account is an idealized version of the "old way." Other accounts will describe variations which have developed in the past years.

881 114 [178]

Certain statements which I make will appear to be at variance with Stewart's Culture Element Distribution Lists. However, I am inclined to think that the absence of traits in the memory of my own informants represents a pattern of change rather than inaccuracies on the part of earlier investigators. With minor exceptions, differences between statements made today and Stewart's lists take the form of traits marked present in the lists which are unknown to my own informants. Moreover, most of these differences are to be found in the [302] hair-combing and scratching complex and suggest that [784] the taboos on hair combing were abandoned some time [182] between the childhood of his informants, who were in their seventies in 1936, and that of my own informants, who are in their seventies today (1959).

302 784 178 881 [177]

The parents of my informants must not have known or not enforced combing taboos, while the parents of Stewart's informants must have considered them proper and so instructed their children. We can speculate, on this basis, that the taboo on hair combing and scratching was abandoned by the Washo some time in the first half of the century. Whether this can be credited to the influence of the white man or to a continuing pattern of change is a matter for further investigation.

881 [115]

The account of the entire puberty complex which follows was given to me by a seventy-five-year-old Washo woman who is generally consulted whenever a family plans to hold the girls' dance.

"When a girl is about ten she is told what is going to happen to her. When her first period comes [she is not specially confined] people tell her to be

band by sending a messenger around the country carrying a knotted cord (ba?ló·go). The knots represented the number of days remaining until the persons who wished to take part in the fight were to gather at the place of assembly, and the messenger untied one knot every day so as to keep track of the time that remained.

After the warriors had assembled, they engaged in a war dance which lasted four or eight nights. During this period, they manufactured bows and arrows. The arrows were smeared with rattlesnake poison obtained by letting a rattlesnake strike a piece of deer meat. The war dance was a kind of test and training for warfare. A man demonstrated by vigorous dancing that he was strong and fit to go to war; and the dance itself consisted of sudden, jerking movements as if one were dodging arrows. The war dance resembled the pine-nut dance in that features of both dances imitated the coming activities: in the war dance, men danced with bows and arrows and acted as if they were at war; in the pine-nut dance, people carried their implements for gathering and cooking pine nuts. Several taboos were observed during the period of the war dance: (1) men and women were forbidden sexual intercourse; (2) warriors could not eat meat and salt; (3) pregnant women could not throw their shadows on men engaged in dancing and they could not touch the bows and arrows.

Shamans who accompanied the war party served two functions: they called on their supernatural power to keep the enemy and his dogs asleep during the assault; and since they were specialists in herbal medicine, they treated the wounded. The shamans also selected the night for the attack. While the Washo were surrounding the enemy camp, the shamans became very intent on their praying so that none of the enemy should awake. The Washo then entered the camp of the enemy, set fire to their huts, and killed them with clubs and arrows as they emerged. Everyone was killed, even small babies.

When the Washo returned, they had a dance which lasted two or four nights. Lowie reports that men and women danced over the capture of the scalp of the enemy regarded as the best fighter. The scalp was tied to the top of an eight-foot, peeled, willow pole, which everyone except young girls seized and shook. The people finally burned the hair of the scalp and then went home (Lowie, 1939, pp. 329-330). My informants omitted mention of the scalp, but said that an important feature of the dance after the fighting was a ritual bath. This was necessary before the warriors could eat or have intercourse with their wives. The Washo apparently were militarily superior to the Miwok and the Maidu on the west, but they found the more numerous Paiute on their eastern border more formidable opponents. The fact that the Paiute obtained horses earlier than the Washo would also have given the Paiute some superiority in warfare.

SUMMARY

Aboriginal Washo culture may be thought of as a blend of Californian and Great Basin cultural traits Heizer and Elsasser (1953, p. 4) note the following ties with California:

> . . . the conical dwelling made by piling up bark slabs; semi-subterranean assembly house; "community" or bedrock mortar; emphasis on coiled

769 114 southern California; but since the statement came in answer to direct inquiry and no further details were forthcoming, its truth cannot be accepted without further evidence." None of the other investigators among the Washo has found evidence of an annual mourning ceremony. Our informants did not report it.

Birth Ceremonies

843

844 Women were active during pregnancy and there were no special observances before birth. When the baby was born, it was bathed, wrapped with its arms at its sides, and placed in a winnowing basket (modal). Bertha Holbrook [854] says that the baby was not bathed again until the umbilical cord fell off. Stewart (1941, 408) says the baby was bathed about every five days and placed 846 in a new basket after each bath. The afterbirth was arranged with the umbil- 844 ical cord inside and buried upright. Stewart (1941, 408) says the afterbirth [842] was wrapped in bark before burial. The Washo believed that if the afterbirth was buried upside down the woman would have no more children. The baby's umbilical cord was kept moistened and was wrapped with ground pinenut bark. [828] When it fell off it was tied to a stick and this in turn was tied to the right side of the winnowing basket. The Washo believed that this would make the baby right-handed.

846 The husband went to a stream and bathed after the birth. He left a [431] present beside the stream which anyone could come and take. Lowie (1939, 305) reports that after the birth the husband gave some man a buckskin, which [751] helped to keep disease away from the infant. Until the cord fell off, the husband took a cold bath every morning; was not supposed to sleep at night; ate [461] no meat, salt or grease; did not gamble or smoke (Stewart, 1941, 409); and was constantly working. The husband's incessant activity was to make the child industrious in later life. When the cord fell off, the mother announced [431] it. Then the husband went hunting, killed some animal, and distributed it in his household. On this day any nonrelative could come and help himself to the property of the husband. After the cord had fallen off, the husband returned to normal life and could again eat meat, salt and grease.

[834] For a month after the birth, the mother did not bathe; ate no meat, grease, or salt; drank only warm water; used a scratching stick (Stewart, 1941, 408); and she and her husband had no sexual intercourse. Stewart (1941, 409) says the couple was continent for from six to 12 months. For two [514] weeks the mother lay tightly covered upon a warm bed. The bed was made by digging a shallow ditch, putting hot sand and ashes in it, and covering it with grass. She did not leave the house during this time, even to relieve herself. The Washo believed that the woman had to be cured inside after a birth and that the hot bed and food taboos aided in draining out the bad blood.

SOME ASPECTS OF WASHO LIFE CYCLE

by John A. Price

121 The intent of this paper is to present a descriptive report of practices concerning birth, puberty, marriage, and death among the Washo as they have been reconstructed through elder Washo informants after more than a century of contact with whites.

127 The author is indebted to Grace Dangberg of Minden, Nevada, for the extensive use of her unpublished field notes. Miss Dangberg worked among the Washo between 1917 and 1920, sponsored in part by a University of [128] California research grant. Miss Dangberg was the major contributor to the section on childbirth, although the author is responsible for the analysis and 114 interpretations throughout the paper. The author worked among the Washo 122 in the summer of 1961, supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship.

Childbirth

● 843 A pregnant woman (dawákaši?) must avoid sleeping flat on her back 513 for this will, according to some, cause her to have twins or problems in 845 delivery. She must be careful to turn from side to side frequently.

841 A pregnant or menstruating woman should never touch or cast her 843 shadow on bows and arrows or rabbit nets. This is one reason why bows 784 and arrows were hung up out of the way. It was a practice for these women [224] to stay away from hunters.

843 Except for these proscriptions the pregnant woman continued her normal daily activities and worked until a few hours before delivery. With a multitude of tasks the Washo woman was always busy, but when the child [162] arrived she stopped all normal work for a period of weeks. The attention of her small community of from 15 to 50 people, in about two to seven dwell- [621] ings, was then focused upon her, her husband, and the child.

844 When a woman was about to be delivered she left camp and retired to a place nearby where a temporary shelter and bed had been prepared for her by her mother or an old woman who acted as a midwife (demedugétiyi?). The bed was made in a shallow trench about as long as the woman. The ground was heated by raking hot earth into it. This layer of earth was covered with

1/1 [footnote appears on p. 114 -- Analyst]

846
527
431 A feast terminated the period (one or two months) during which the
603 mother was not permitted to eat meat. Gifts were given away and it was par-
852 ticularly important for the grandparents to be present, the food being passed to them first. The mother at this feast ate meat again and a little ritual was performed for the baby.

854 The baby was often rubbed with soft sagebrush, which after use was
302 thrown eastward. If it was a girl her forehead and cheeks were painted with red ocher. If it was a boy his nose and chin were painted with a white pigment (dípek).

352 The first cradle was used on the day of birth and a new cradle was
854 used after each bath during the mother's confinement. These temporary cradles are quite different from the permanent cradles in having an oval back, woven sides at the head end, and no hood in front or crossbars on the back.[5] The temporary cradles are not used today and are rarely seen.

The baby was placed in its first permanent basketry cradle at the end of the mother's confinement, and new larger cradles were used as the child
751 grew. Up to five cradles may have been used before the child began to walk. The hood or sunshade (maʔyó·dop) of the cradle had pendants of shell or beads suspended from the front "to prevent the child from becoming cross-eyed."
531 Hank Pete said that the baby's umbilical cord was tied to the front of the hood for this purpose. The hood still carries a design of parallel diagonal lines for a boy and a continuous zigzag or diamond chain design for a girl.

854 A sagebrush bark pad was placed in the cradle and the infant, wrapped in a small rabbitskin robe, was placed over this and lashed to the cradle with buckskin. A buckskin strap was attached to the back of the cradle and passed over the forehead of the woman who carried it.

843 If a miscarriage occurred the fetus was disposed of in the same manner as the placenta and umbilical cord and the same beliefs attended this act.
754 One woman was careless enough to allow her mother-in-law, who was angry with her, to see the disposal of the fetus. It was believed that the mother-in-law had either destroyed it or turned it over and buried it in another place, because this woman never had another child and was in poor health after the miscarriage.

845 A stillborn baby was buried in warmed ground and the baby basket
847 was placed in the crotch of a tree, or merely thrown away. Abortion was effected by applying pressure to the abdomen. The men are said to have objected to this.

5 A Susie Dick made one of these cradles for Grace Dangberg.